

U.K. could soon ban legal drug 'meow meow'

By DAMIAN ROBIN
Epoch Times Staff

LONDON—Mephedrone, a legal drug linked to over 20 recent deaths, could be banned "within a matter weeks" in the United Kingdom, according to U.K. Home Secretary Alan Johnson.

The drug is sold ostensibly as a plant food on Web sites specifically for it, and in one year it has become one of the most popular drugs on the club scene.

Johnson wants to use legislation to ban mephedrone and any similar concoctions that could be cooked up by manufacturers.

In Ayr, Scotland, a campaign to ban the drug began after the death of 19-year-old Jordan Kiltie from Dalmilling following a night out with friends where it's believed mephedrone was taken.

Ayr has an adult shop, Bodystyle International, that sells mephedrone. Owner Frank Nicholson told the Ayrshire Post, "We're still selling the product but taking it under advisement as we speak. However, if we were to stop selling mephedrone, people can easily go elsewhere in Ayrshire and get similarly manufactured products."

Toxicologist Dr. John Ramsey, who works to identify drugs in the laboratory, told Holly Williams of Sky News that the "Chinese chemical industry seems to provide anything at a price. So if somebody here orders something they'll either synthesize it or have it in stock, and they'll send it, regardless of what it's to be used for."

Posing as a potential customer, Sky contacted Blinkchem, a Shanghai-based company, and discovered that Blinkchem already has five British customers—"two of them big ones."

When Blinkchem was asked if the banning of the drugs would cause problems, she was told that they were prepared. "We're working on five or six new legal products," she was told. "Most of them come from our British customers. They told us how to make the new ones."

The U.K. government Web site, ASK FRANK, which pitches information to young people, states that cathinone is a naturally occurring stimulant found in the khat plant and cathinones are a group of drugs related to amphetamine compounds like ecstasy.

"Meow meow can come in the form of capsules, tablets, or white powder that users may swallow, snort, or even inject. It acts as a stimulant and a 'psychedelic,' with reportedly similar properties to the drug ecstasy (MDMA)," an NHS Web site states. The khat plant grows in eastern

Africa, where locals chew it for an amphetamine-like high. The drug is also referred to as M-Kat.

The NHS site states that medical and scientific information on mephedrone is "scarce" although "it seems sensible to assume that mephedrone is not safe unless rigorous scientific research proves otherwise."

"Many of the initial medical case reports on mephedrone suggest that it can cause problems with breathing and the circulatory system, particularly when combined with alcohol," it states.

Professor Les Iversen, chair of the the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD), advised the U.K. Home secretary that the drug should be placed in the Class B category. The classification would make possession of the drug punishable with up to five years in jail, and selling it would be punishable with up to 14 years behind bars.

Although autopsies have found mephedrone in the bodies of several young people, no inquests have determined that the drug was directly responsible for any deaths. It would be viewed as politically expedient for Johnson to act on Iversen's advice as there is public concern in the U.K. about the drug's easy availability and its perceived treacherous nature.

Classifying meow meow as illegal before the coming election is similar to the inception of the Misuse of Drugs Act, 40 years ago, says Don Barnard of the Legalise Cannabis Alliance.

He said that when Jacqui Smith was Home secretary she tried to "close down the head shops," which sell drug paraphernalia. He said that she intended to have local authorities use the Medical Act to close them if it was not achieved via normal police work.

He sees the current activity of Johnson and the ACMD as part of the same movement.

Taylor said that she and others stayed on to see how the U.K. government would react.

Despite Taylor's resignation, U.K. Home Office lawyers said they read the Misuse of Drugs Act as meaning the Advisory Council can report and the government can legislate for a ban acted immediately on receipt of the ACMD's advice.

There are several parliamentary stages for the drug to go through, before being legally classified. "I am seeking cross-party support to swiftly ban these dangerous drugs from our streets," Johnson said. "Parliament permitting, I hope to do this in a matter of weeks."

Rio Tinto trial worries Australia's business community

By LILLIAN CHANG
Epoch Times Staff

The trial against Australian citizen and former Rio Tinto executive Stern Hu has concluded, but the process raises more questions than it answers for the international community.

Australia's Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said that the trial left "serious unanswered questions" about Stern Hu's conviction.

"In holding this part of the trial in secret, China, I believe, has missed an opportunity to demonstrate to the world at large transparency that would be consistent with its emerging global role," he said.

An Australian business group has also raised concerns, asking for clarity on aspects of China's legal system.

Stern Hu, an Australia citizen of Chinese heritage, was convicted of two charges—bribery and stealing commercial secrets—in the Shanghai No.1 Intermediate People's Court on Monday.

On the bribery charges, Mr. Hu was sentenced to seven years imprisonment, plus a confiscation of half a million yuan (CA\$73,600).

On the stealing commercial secrets charge, he was sentenced to five years and a fine of another half million yuan.

Overall, the court determined the sentence would be 10 years plus the fines.

Commenting on the bribery sentence, Australia's Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said in a statement, "On its face, there was, according to Australian officials, evidence, indeed if not substantial evidence, that bribery acts had occurred."

Mr. Hu and two Chinese national Rio Tinto colleagues, Liu Caikui and Ge Mingqiang, had reportedly admitted to bribery, although Mr. Hu and Mr. Liu had questioned the amounts alleged. Some business leaders, including Canada's Kevin O'Leary, have suggested bribery is a normal part of doing business in China.

Wang Yong, the fourth Rio Tinto employee accused, denied the charges saying the moneys received were a loan.

All four were sentenced with

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—Kevin Rudd, Australian Prime Minister

charges from 7 to 14 years.

Mr. Smith said that while he could not comment on the sentences of the three Chinese nationals, he believed Mr. Hu's sentence was "very harsh."

"Can I make this point that on any measure, this is a tough sentence," he said.

On the second sentence of stealing commercial secrets, Mr. Smith said that despite a round of appeals at various levels of Chinese officialdom and Australian government requests for transparency during the trial, the importance of that had been ignored.

"The Australian government had made the point to China previously, indeed since the detention of Stern Hu, that at one level it may have been that all we were dealing with here was information or material which was generally available so far as commercial negotiations were concerned. And this has been of keen interest to the Australian business community and to the international business community," he said.

China's rulers lost an opportunity to clarify what was meant by "commercial secrets," Mr. Smith said.

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry said it wants clarification on legal aspects of the case, particularly detention without charge and the



UNANSWERED QUESTIONS: Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd speaks at a gathering in Melbourne on March 30. He said the trial in China of four employees of the Australian-British mining giant Rio Tinto, over charges of bribery and stealing commercial secrets, left "serious unanswered questions." WILLIAM WEST/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

lack of transparency, and also Australia's consular agreement with China.

"The limited application of the consular agreement with Australia is a worrying development," said the chamber's manager of trade and international affairs, Nathan Backhouse, in a statement. "Stricter application would be desirable in any future proceedings."

Chen Yonglin, a former Chinese diplomat who defected to Australia from the Sydney Chinese Consulate in 2005, saw the sentences as a veiled threat to future Chinese people working for

multinationals in China.

"In China, if you are of Chinese origin, whether you are a national or not, you are Chinese," he told The Epoch Times. "So this is a lesson for the Chinese—if you work for foreign companies, you also work for the Chinese Communist Party."

Mr. Chen said that depending on the stakes, it would now always be in the back of Chinese nationals' minds that they could be punished if the commercial interests of the Party were undermined.

"This is the message the Chinese regime wants to send to Chinese people," he said.

The battle of Britain's belt-tighteners

By SIMON VEAZEY
Epoch Times Staff

LONDON—It's not often that politicians from the three different parties—Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat—agree on something. Even less often do they admit the need

for deep cuts in public spending just weeks from an election. But in the first televised debate of its kind in the United Kingdom, the three potential holders of the nation's purse strings agreed that the country needed spending cuts deeper than anything under former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

That's where the similarities ended. The rest of the hour-long pre-election debate on Monday predictably saw the current chancellor and his two rivals chewing over how those cuts would be made, how to tackle the all-important deficit—and whose fault it all was in the first place.

With the country just clambering unsteadily out of recession and with a yawning deficit of £167 billion (CA\$229 billion), the economy has become the focus of the election, pushing the would-be chancellors, equivalent to the U.S. treasurer, into the limelight.

Details of exactly where cuts would be made were absent from the debate, but the electoral messages of the three parties came through. The incumbent Alistair Darling emphasized that the government had made the right calls on the economy, chiming with his budget speech in which he painted



British Opposition Conservative Party Shadow Chancellor George Osborne speaks at a press conference in central London, on March 29. CARL COURT/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

the government as a world leader in staving off a global financial meltdown.

Tory shadow Chancellor George Osborne's refrain was that 13 years of overspending and borrowing by Labour had turned one of the strongest economies in Europe—inherited from a Tory government—into one of the weakest.

Vince Cable, whose economic credentials rest in part on his prediction of the banking collapse,

joined the chancellor in attacking the Tory plans and accused the Tories of wanting to get "their noses in the trough and reward their rich backers."

There were no fireworks or gross errors in the performances, noted many commentators, who struggled to pick out a clear winner.

The debate is seen as a warm-up act to a series of three televised debates between the leaders of the three main parties. Britain

until now has been a stranger to the culture of pre-election TV debates that dominate U.S. elections and are also held in Canada.

With polls predicting a hung Parliament—something that has happened only twice before—the election is not the usual two-horse race of British politics, giving more prominence to the Liberal Democrat Party, whose leader may become the "kingmaker" if neither of the two main parties gains an outright majority.

States challenge new health care law

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Oklahoma and Arizona will have such measures appear on the November ballot, and as many as 41 states have similar legislation proposed, according to the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a free markets, limited government organization.

In South Carolina, Lt. Gov. Andre Bauer is asking state lawmakers to support a resolution calling for a constitutional convention to amend the Constitution and overturn "socialized medicine."

"The freedoms we have enjoyed in our lifetimes are being steadily eroded, and future generations will suffer the consequences," Mr. Bauer stated in a letter sent to the state's General Assembly March 25, referring to the health care reform legislation's mandate of required health insurance coverage.

The convention process for amendment is outlined in Article V of the Constitution, requiring two-thirds, or 34 of the states to call, or "apply," for the convention.

The Article V process has never been used to amend the Constitution, but the threat of it is believed to be behind the passage of a few amendments historically in Congress, which required a two-thirds majority vote.

STATES' RIGHTS

The foundation of this resistance to the recent Health Care Reform Act is a belief that the new law oversteps the constitutionally-defined boundaries of the federal government, infringing on the rights and power of individual states.

Supporters of states' rights principles and limited federal power—echoed in Tea Party movement tenets—point to the 10th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which

Historically, the U.S. Supreme Court rarely overturns federal law based on 10th Amendment arguments

implies that powers not granted to the federal government are retained by the states and their citizens.

"The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people," it states.

Historically, the U.S. Supreme Court rarely overturns federal law based on 10th Amendment arguments, with one recent exception being a 1997 *Printz v. United States* ruling that declared certain interim provisions of the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act unconstitutional.

A sign that Tea Party ideals and influence may be a factor in upcoming November elections is President Barack Obama's nod to the group and its concerns in a Tuesday interview with Matt Lauer, on NBC's *Today Show*.

The president said that the group had "mainstream, legitimate concerns" over government measures and spending, and that legislative steps—such as the recent economic bailout—have fed a sense that the federal government was "taking on too much" and "things were out of control."

The president concluded that as his administration tackled deficit issues and other issues in the future, Tea Party membership would dissipate as concerns were addressed.